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DEATH OF LEWIS D. ERWIN.

A MEMORIAL SKETCH BY HOWARD F. DYSON.

Hon. Lewis D. Erwin, Rushville's oldest and most honored citizen, died at his home on North Liberty street in that city, Saturday evening, March 7, 1914, at 10:30 o'clock. He was in the ninety-ninth year of his age, and his death ends a career that is a most illustrious one and spans the development of the State of Illinois, where he has been a resident since 1839, and all of these years were spent in Schuyler county.

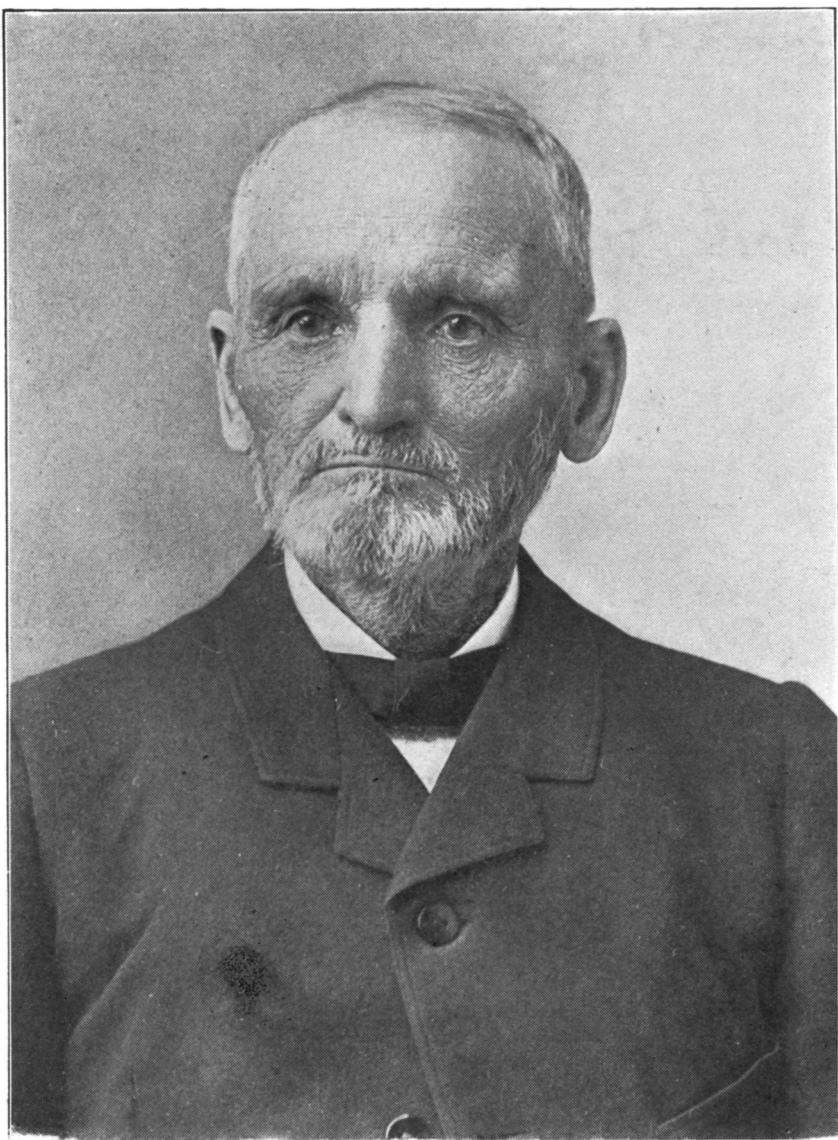
His lifework had long since been finished. He had rounded out a noble career as a citizen and representative of the people in the Illinois legislature, and was honored as an exemplar of all that was highest, noblest and best in a manhood devoted to his country's service.

Up to within two days of his death he kept in touch with public affairs, and asked to have the daily paper read to him. The sleep into which he sank Saturday afternoon was unbroken. His family realized that the end was rapidly drawing near, and his death at 10:30 p. m. was scarcely preceptible.

In the death of Mr. Erwin, Rushville mourns the loss of one of her most distinguished citizens; he had been identified with the interests of this city for more than seventy years, and no man took a more conspicuous part in the public affairs. He won high honor on his merit as a public official in city, county and state, and was in the truest sense a high ideal of a model and exemplary citizen.

The ending years of Mr. Erwin's life were beautiful ones. He lived in the memory of an historic past. His home life was ideal, and the closing years of his life were made happy by the companionship of his daughters who were ever his constant companions.

Lewis D. Erwin became a citizen of Schuyler county in 1839, when he drove overland from Ohio to Illinois, and took up his home in Littleton township, where his brother George had



HON. LEWIS D. ERWIN

located the year before. He was a native of the State of New York, where he was born July 1, 1815, at Plattsburg. When a young man he went to Toledo, Ohio, where he spent several years, and during this time was a clerk in the postoffice. In those early days, a young man with an education was in demand, and Mr. Erwin soon found employment as clerk of the warehouse at Erie, the old abandoned river town between Frederick and Beardstown. Here he was employed during 1840-41, and after making a short stay in Jacksonville, returned to Schuyler county.

At a time when Rushville was the home of such men as William A. Richardson, William A. Minshall and Robert Blackwell, all of whom later won renown in state and national politics, Mr. Erwin began a political career that was an illustrious one. He was a Democrat of the old school, loyal and true, and became the intimate and confidential friend of Stephen A. Douglas, and was prominent in the councils of his party. He was a supporter of Douglas in his memorable senatorial contest of 1858 and voted for him for United States Senator. The defeat of Douglas, the idol of Illinois Democracy, for the presidency, ended what might have been a national career for Mr. Erwin, as few men were closer in touch with the "Little Giant" than he. But throughout the long years of defeat he was loyal and enthusiastic in his support of Democracy, and was overjoyed to see the party come into power again with the election of President Wilson and the Illinois State ticket.

Mr. Erwin's first public office in Schuyler county was that of deputy sheriff and collector under Enoch Edmonston, and when Mr. Edmonston went to the front in the Mexican war his young deputy took over the duties of the office. Col. Richardson's company of Schuyler volunteers for Mexican service were mustered in at the old court house in Rushville in 1846, and Mr. Erwin wrote the muster roll with his paper spread on a drum head.

Faithful to duty in the trust imposed upon him, mentally alert and richly endowed with keen political sagacity, it was natural that Mr. Erwin should aspire to higher political honors, and in 1846 he was elected a representative in the Illinois General Assembly. His service in the Legislature came at a time when intelligent, strong-minded men were sorely needed, and his record in that early session was a most creditable one.

The era of railroad building had just begun and the State had constructed at a cost of \$1,000,000 a railroad from Springfield to Meredosia, the first in the State. Mr. Erwin took a position against State ownership of railroads and voted to sell the Northern Cross Road for \$21,100.

During this first term in the Legislature he served with John Logan, father of General John A. Logan, and came in close contact with ex-governor John Reynolds, Judge Sidney Breeze and Governor Ford, all of whom were conspicuous in those early days and have enriched Illinois history with historical writings. Mr. Erwin knew all these men personally, and his mind and memory were a marvelous storehouse of knowledge of the romantic history of early days in Illinois.

During his career in the Legislature which began during the administration of Gov. Augustus C. French in 1846, Mr. Erwin was brought closely in contact with men of affairs and knew personally all the State governors from John Reynolds, who served the State as executive from 1830 to 1834.

A warm friendship existed between Mr. Erwin and John M. Palmer, and, when the Democratic party became divided on the money issue, Mr. Erwin was a delegate to the Chicago convention and voted for his lifelong friend for the presidential nomination. At the time General Palmer was preparing his notes for a history of the Bench and Bar of Illinois he called upon Mr. Erwin to aid him, and he gave interesting historical matter concerning the early lawyers in Rushville and those legal giants who made the circuit in pioneer days.

In 1850, Mr. Erwin was elected sheriff and collector of Schuyler county, and in 1852 was chosen circuit clerk, which was the last county office he held. In 1856 he was returned to the Legislature and served until commencement of the Civil War, and was one of the noble patriots of the state who stood loyally behind President Lincoln when the call for troops was made in Illinois and the State was called upon to appropriate \$2,000,000 to equip her forces then waiting to go to the front.

During his distinguished services in the Illinois Legislature the country was at the threshold of a civil war. Mr. Erwin had been elected as a Douglas Democrat in 1858, and he voted for Stephen A. Douglas for United States senator. But when two years later Lincoln was elected president and civil war threatened to disrupt the country, Lewis D. Erwin was a loyal Democratic patriot and gave aid and support to Richard Yates, the

war governor of Illinois, and voted the money to send the Illinois troops in the field.

In 1863, Mr. Erwin, who had then retired from the Legislature, was appointed one of the Committee of Three to distribute \$30,000 voted by the Illinois Legislature for the aid of soldiers in the field. He left Springfield in February of that year and went down the Mississippi river to where the Illinois troops had been fighting in the Cumberland campaign. He not only was entrusted with the money voted by the State, but he took upon himself many private commissions and delivered messages and supplies to the soldiers in the field, who joyously welcomed his coming, and ever remembered him with thankful and grateful hearts. Mr. Erwin was engaged in this work from February until September in 1863, and returning home, made a report of his disposal of the State money distributed.

Lewis D. Erwin idolized Stephen A. Douglas to the day of his death, and was one of the level-headed Democrats who did his utmost to carry out the dying wish of the "Little Giant" as expressed in his masterly speech in Chicago, which rallied Illinois to the Union cause and gave unmeasured support to President Lincoln.

The ascendency of the Republican party in Illinois brought to an end Mr. Erwin's active political career, but did not dim his usefulness as a public spirited citizen in the community where he was spared to spend more than seventy-five years of his life.

In municipal affairs, in the schools and in the churches Mr. Erwin exerted a most powerful influence. Unaided and alone he maintained Rushville's free public library after he had passed the allotted age of three score and ten, and no one was more enthusiastic than he in bringing about the re-establishment of a public library on a firm and solid basis.

In every movement for the betterment and uplift of the city and its industries he played a conspicuous part, and was foremost in securing for Rushville its railroad and was for many years an officer in the first organized company. Nor did the weight of years dim his enthusiasm, and he was as enthusiastic in his comment on the interurban as he was in the early pioneer days when every community was seeking a new railroad.

Throughout his long life, Mr. Erwin was inspired with high motives and his political career was untarnished. He was true to his country and his friends, and his life is emblematic of all

that is noble and good, and may be handed down to the young men of the present day as an example worthy of emulation to those striving for success, honor and achievement.

On January 6, 1878, Mr. Erwin became identified with the first Presbyterian church of Rushville. October 30, 1881, he was elected elder and continued in that office until he rounded out his thirty-three years of service. His keen interest and loyal devotion to church work never lagged, but was a joy to him always.

November 12, 1843, Mr. Erwin was united in marriage to Miss Elvira Wells, daughter of Charles Wells of Rushville. There were eleven children born to them, seven of whom are living; thirteen grandchildren, two having passed away; four great grandchildren. Mrs. Erwin died October 16, 1875. The children outliving their father are: One son, George L. Erwin of Kalamazoo, Mich., and six daughters, Miss Kate Erwin, Miss Matilda Erwin, Mrs. Washington Hall, Miss Emma Erwin, Mrs. Louis Babcock of Rushville, and Mrs. Edward L. Davis of Tacoma, Washington.

Tuesday morning, March 10, 1914, at 10 o'clock, funeral services were held at the family residence, and in harmony with his life the ceremonies were simple. In the absence of his regular pastor, Rev. D. E. Jackson of Ipava came to Rushville to conduct the funeral services, and he is one of the young men who have felt the inspiring influence of the life of Rushville's "Grand Old Man," and his discourse was an eloquent tribute to his memory.

Mr. Erwin was one of the builders of Rushville. His influence was exerted along many different lines, and to good purpose in city government and in the schools, where he rendered gratuitous service of high degree.

He was one of ten staunch Democrats who founded THE RUSHVILLE TIMES in 1856, and he gave the paper its name. Throughout the long years, he ever manifested a keen interest in the old home paper, and the editor treasures his friendship as a benediction and a blessing.

A true friend, a progressive and loyal citizen, has closed his life career, but his good and worthy deeds will live on and on.